

Scottish Presbyterians and the Act of Union 1707. Jeffrey Stephen. vi+274 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. £50.00. ISBN: 978 0 7486 2505 5.

Without doubt, a “new” historiography concerning the 1707 Union between Scotland and England has burst on to the scene in the past two years, focused on the tercentenary of the union in 2007. Jeff Stephen’s book has been an important contribution to this new historiography, focusing on the *bête noir* of the traditional historiography of the Union, namely the Church of Scotland.

Stephen’s book is based on his doctoral thesis at the University of Aberdeen. The book has a very short preface, which reads like an abstract to a PhD thesis. There are three quotations in the preface, but no references are given, so it is impossible to identify the particular historians that Stephen is alluding to at the start of the book. Thereafter, the book consists of seven chapters – the Religious and Political background, 1689-1706, Securing the Church in the Event of a Union, the Commission of the General Assembly, Presbyteries and Parishes: Addressing against the Union, the Church and Popular Protest, Incorporating Union: The Search for an Alternative and a final short chapter on the 1707 General Assembly and its aftermath. There is a tension between the title and the content of the book, with a strong institutional emphasis, and perhaps a different title using the Church of Scotland might have been more appropriate. In some respects, the title of the book is a confusing and perhaps misleading one. Is the book actually about the Church of Scotland as an institution or is it more concerned with Scottish Presbyterians themselves? Unfortunately, the book lacks a historiographical chapter concerning the Church of Scotland, Scottish Presbyterians and the Union. This is a missed opportunity and it would have undoubtedly enhanced the book’s qualities. Such a chapter could have dealt with the specific historiography relating to the Church and the Union, as well as an overview of the development of Presbyterianism and the religious politics of the Church in the post-Reformation period. This would have

been useful for undergraduate students as well as the educated non-academic reader.

Nevertheless, this is a useful and an important book. Stephen's book represents the most detailed study of the Church, its internal structures and its debates concerning the Union. The author deserves credit for this. The bibliography indicates the sheer amount of original archive research that has gone into this book. Again, this is the most detailed archive research that has been done on the Church of Scotland and the Union. In addition, an impressive range of primary material, especially pamphlet literature has been covered. An appendix gives details of important church committees and their membership. The political affiliation of the committee members is also provided here. This is itself should be an important resource for further research for academics and students.

The first chapter is self-explanatory in the sense that it covers the religious politics of the post-1689 period. The focus of chapter two is on the developments resulting in the Act for the Security of the Church of November 1706, in the aftermath of the treaty negotiations, and Parliament now in session debating and voting on the treaty articles. Chapter 3 examines the role of the Commission of the General Assembly and the next two chapters deal with addresses against the Union and popular protest, how the Church dealt with these and what the attitude of the Church towards them was. These latter two chapters, within the context of the "new" Union historiography, need to be viewed alongside Karin Bowie's book published in 2007 on *Scottish Public Opinion and the Anglo-Scottish Union 1699-1707*. Collectively, the work of Bowie and Stephen now provide a definitive account of both petitioning and public disorder. Stephen persuasively argues that petitioning was more or less a minority interest with only 5% of presbyteries and parishes petitioning against Union. In terms of the historiography of the Union concerning potential armed resurrection and a pragmatic resistant movement against the Union, Stephen persuasively demolishes the notion of a Cameronian-Jacobite alliance to stop the Union and he takes apart the accounts of John Ker of Kersland

and George Lockhart of Carnwath concerning this issue. Chapter six deals with alternatives to Union and looks at contemporary tracts and pamphlet literature, such as the work of George Ridpath, for example. This chapter also deals with the Hebronites and confessional confederation as well as the Cameronians and the Scottish Covenanted Republic. Chapter six does contain material in a wider seventeenth century context and perhaps some of this might have been better placed in an introductory chapter. Chapter seven gives a brief overview of the 1707 General Assembly, but there is no real overall conclusion to the book. A brief concluding chapter summarising the author's arguments and conclusions would have been useful, especially for the non-expert and students. The overall conclusion that appears to come through is that of the political neutrality of the Church, self-interest, and the role of Providence. The Commission of the General Assembly provided a leadership role and it liaised between the Church and the State. Returning to my earlier comments on the problem with the book title, perhaps more could have been made of rank and file Presbyterians, although such an approach may have been limited by the sources.

This is an important book not only for our understanding of the 1707 Union, but also of the history of the Church of Scotland. It will obviously be important for the academic world, but it should also benefit those interested in ecclesiastical history, as well as the personnel of the present day Church of Scotland. From a wider perspective, it can be argued that Stephen's book, in addition to some of the conclusions by Chris Whatley in *The Scots and the Union*, provides a strong case for the rehabilitation of Scottish Presbyterianism, not only with regard to the 1707 Union, but also its wider importance for understanding the Scottish past. The *bête noir* has returned to the family home.

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